

Are you interested in biology? Passionate about the environment? Like being outdoors? If so, you should consider a career in forestry.

Many people think foresters spend their days measuring trees, or in a fire tower watching for fires in remote scenic areas. Foresters still occasionally do these things, but they do so much more!

Foresters are not loggers or woods laborers, but they may interact with both groups of people. They are best described as professionals who use their knowledge of plant and animal ecology to manage forest ecosystems for many purposes.

show me the jobs

The limited job market of the 1970s and 80s produced a persistent notion that job opportunities in forestry are poor to nonexistent. This is no longer true. Job placement for graduating foresters has been quite good in recent years and is expected to remain so in the near future.

In the next five years, the U.S.D.A. Forest Service predicts that 32 percent of its foresters will leave the service, mostly to retirement, and predicts hiring nearly 500 foresters to replace them. Other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Geologic Survey, Environmental Protection Agency and other agencies, face similar situations. Many professionals now wonder where the next generation of foresters will come from.

Since World War II, career opportunities in forestry have been cyclical. Immediately after the war, large numbers of returning servicemen trained as foresters. Jobs were plentiful in the expanding federal government, as well as in the private sec-

careers in forestry

tor. As these professionals began retiring in the late 1960's and 1970's, the environmental movement triggered an enormous enrollment in forestry schools in the 1970s and early 1980s. More graduating foresters were produced than the traditional forestry job market could absorb.

This same limited job market spurred graduate foresters to find productive and satisfying careers in novel applications of their skills. Some foresters developed careers in environmental law and regulation, and in remote sensing and digital image analysis.

Urban forestry, in particular, saw rapid development as foresters discovered they were uniquely capable of helping cities deal with the effects of catastrophic losses of American



The job market
is **greening up**
for **forestry**
professionals.

by Justine Gartner and Steve Pallardy
photography by Cliff White

elm trees to Dutch Elm Disease. Once this crisis passed, it was clear that foresters, with their skills in managing populations of trees and other vegetation, could play a permanent role in both public and private sectors.

“There is a great network of people and resources within the urban forestry community supporting each other and sharing ideas,” said Meredith McAvoy, an urban forester with a forestry consulting firm. “As a born and raised fan of the city, I am happy to be part of the team that is ensuring a successful future for the urban green space of St. Louis.”

Part of today’s demand for trained foresters comes from traditional, resource-based forestry enterprises, both public and private. However, urban forestry is becoming a more important discipline as cities address their environmental, development, aesthetic and quality-of-life issues.

Forestry used to be primarily a male occupation. Today, however, more women are studying forestry in our colleges and entering the ranks of professional foresters.

Foresters earn salaries equivalent to many other professions requiring a college degree. Recent starting salaries have been in the mid-\$20,000 to mid-\$30,000 range. Forest industry positions often pay more. The Bureau of Labor Statistics data for 2001 indicated that the median salary for all foresters was about \$44,000, with 50 percent earning between \$35,000 and \$54,000.

In February 2002, Terry Clark, Science Manager for the Society of American Foresters, reported that salaries for SAF members were “clustered around a pay range of from \$30,000 to \$55,000. Another large group, representing upper level government employees, earned \$70,000-\$75,000, and a third group earned over \$80,000 per year.”

Today’s job market provides a broad range of job opportunities open to foresters. Most of them require a university education leading to a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry.

forest management

Many landowners, both private and corporate, actively manage their woodlands, creating demand for the services of foresters like Jeremy Wilson, a graduate of the University of Missouri. Wilson runs a company that performs forest thinning, tree planting and timber sales.

“Despite the heat and the paperwork, I wouldn’t trade my job for anything,” Wilson said. “I love being able to work with landowners and help them address their varying interests. The diversity of tasks that are involved in forestry assures that I’ll never be bored.”

A career in forestry offers long-term security and satisfaction. People working with trees, whether studying them, planting them, monitoring them or actively managing them, have the satisfaction of helping Missouri’s forests grow.



Jeremy Wilson



Meredith McAvoy



Russell Schmidt (foreground) and crew

Based on a landowner's needs and goals, a forester may recommend tree planting, forest thinning or a harvest. They may also suggest activities to make the forest more desirable for deer, turkey and other wildlife.

David Massengale is the district silviculturist for the Mark Twain National Forest Salem Ranger District. He writes management prescriptions for stands of trees. Examples of prescriptions include tree planting or stand improvement. He maintains the district computer database where all tree stand data is kept.

"The best part of the job has to be initiating a management plan on a stand and then seeing it through," Massengale said. "It's rewarding to be able to look at that stand afterwards and see the improvement in it and its potential for the future."

urban forestry

Foresters who work with municipalities are called city or community foresters. Here, you may find yourself working with developers to save trees during construction, supervising the planting of new trees, removing trees that have become hazardous to people or property, or overseeing the pruning of established trees.

A community forester's goal is to have a healthy and growing forest in town despite the tremendous stress trees experience in that type of environment.

"One of my favorite parts of the job is working with people who are enthusiastic about trees and teaching others about the importance of our urban forest," said McAvoy. "It is immensely satisfying to see the results from projects ranging from tree inventories to preservation plans. I like knowing that I had a hand in bettering the urban forest."



David Massengale



Scott Wagner

The demand for trained people to work in forestry is rising. Missouri's forests provide a wealth of opportunity for people who love the outdoors and enjoy working with a growing resource.

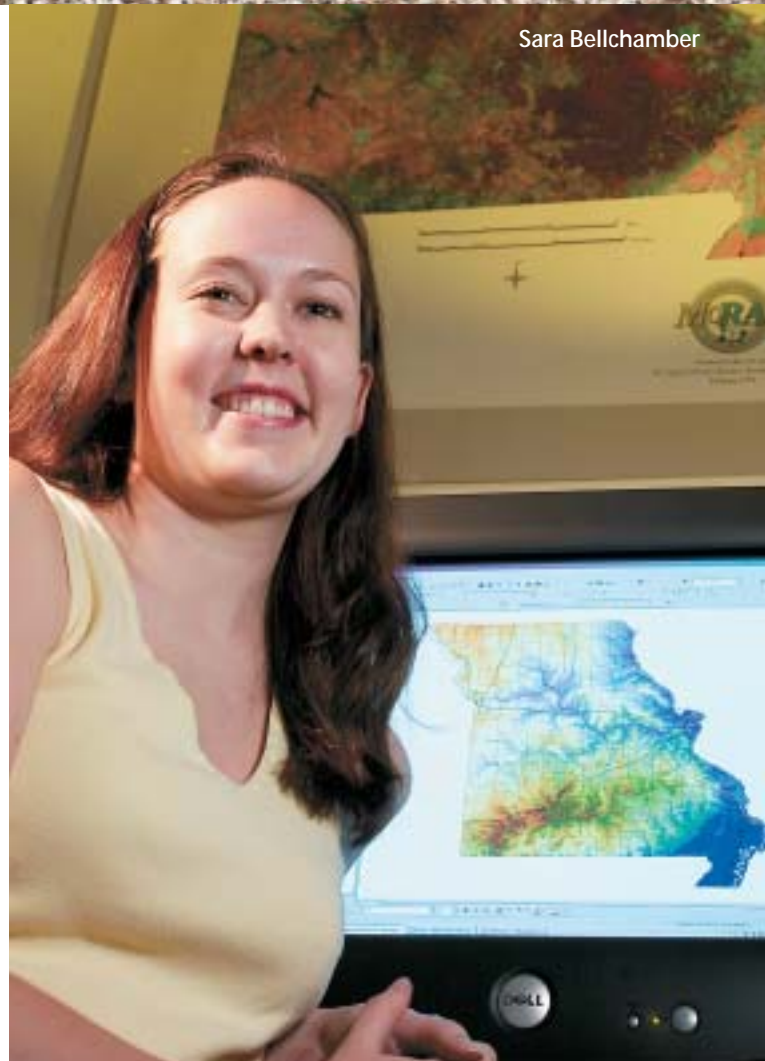
fire suppression

A carelessly thrown match or an unsupervised burn barrel can create a devastating fire. Among other responsibilities, foresters help suppress escaped fires. Russell Schmidt, Fire Training Coordinator for the Missouri Department of Conservation, spends half of the year developing fire-training programs for rural fire departments and for state and federal employees. He spends the other half coordinating personnel assignments for fire duty in the West.

"The best part of my job is teaching people safe methods of managing fires, both wild and prescribed," Schmidt said. "For job satisfaction, you can't beat forestry as a career."

wood products

Some foresters, such as Connie Rehagen of Perryville, work in private industry. Rehagen runs his own mill in Perryville, where trees are converted into lumber. That lumber is then shipped all over the United States and into Canada. For years, Rehagen has used his forestry degree and training to produce a product that is in high demand.



Sara Bellchamber



Connie Rehagen

“Forestry is 10 percent resource management and 90 percent people management. Your people skills are as important as, or more important than, your technical skills.”

“I like producing beautiful boards and then traveling the country seeing those boards used in buildings and homes,” Rehagen said.

remote sensing/geographic information systems

Developments in computer and communications technology have had a dramatic impact on a forester’s ability to map and describe parcels of land. The inventory of a parcel of land is not complete without using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Global Positioning Systems (GPS). Sara Bellchamber, a forestry graduate student at the University of Missouri specializing in GIS and forest ecology, said, “GIS allows me to visualize many aspects of a forest landscape, which helps enormously in making better management decisions.”

specialty areas

Some foresters work in unique jobs that are not easily categorized. Scott Wagner, for example, operates a nursery called the Regional Growing Out Station (RGOS). The nursery is run by Forest ReLeaf of Missouri.

“The study of forestry can provide a person with a number of unique opportunities,” Wagner said. “My education allowed me to join the Peace Corps and work overseas on an agroforestry project, and now I’m able to be a part of an organization that is making a real difference in Missouri.”

With the help of many volunteers, Wagner plants seedling trees provided by The National Tree Trust into pots at RGOS. He grows the trees to a bigger size and then distributes them for planting on public property.

Teaching the public about the role of foresters is also important. Bruce Palmer, Forestry Information Specialist for the Missouri Department of Conservation, coordinates forestry information and education for the Department.

“I’m basically the forestry public relations person,” Palmer explained. “I conduct workshops for teachers and Department staff to teach them about forests and forest management in Missouri. I also work with the news media and the Department’s media specialists to convey information about Missouri’s forests.

“If you are going into forestry because you think you’ll spend days in the woods with just you and your black Lab, think again,” Palmer added. “Forestry is 10 percent resource management and 90 percent people management. Your people skills are as important as, or more important than, your technical skills.” ▲

For more information about a career in forestry contact the following organizations:

- Society of American Foresters (www.safnet.org/index.shtml)
- Missouri Chapter of the Society of American Foresters (www.snr.missouri.edu/mosaf/)
- School of Natural Resources, University of Missouri-Columbia (www.snr.missouri.edu/forestry/; e-mail contact: forestry@www.snr.missouri.edu)



Bruce Palmer



Private industry,
education and
government all
have a need for
trained foresters.

A degree in
forestry may have
you performing
prescribed burns,
planting seedlings,
managing forests
or working in the
timber industry.